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SIPDIS

DEPT PASS USAID TO LAC/RSD, LAC/SAM, G/ENV, PPC/ENV  
TREASURY FOR USED IBRD AND IDB AND INTL/MDB  
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE: LIZ MAHEW  
INTERIOR FOR DIR INT AFFAIRS: K WASHBURN  
INTERIOR FOR FWS: TOM RILEY  
INTERIOR FOR NPS: JONATHAN PUTNAM  
INTERIOR PASS USGS FOR INTERNATIONAL: J WEAVER  
JUSTICE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES: JWEBB  
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL: CAM HILL-MACON  
USDA FOR ARS/INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH: G FLANLEY  
NSF FOR INTERNATIONAL: HAROLD STOLBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AMERICA ESTH NEWS, NUMBER 116

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1. The following is number 116 in a series of newsletters, published by the Brasilia Regional Environmental Hub, covering environment, science and technology, and health news in South America. The information below was gathered from news sources from across the region, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Hub office or our constituent posts. Addressees who would like to receive a user-friendly email version of this newsletter should contact Larissa Stoner at stonerla@state.gov. NOTE: THE NEWSLETTER IS NOW ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE BRASILIA INTRANET PAGE, BY CLICKING ON THE 'HUB' LINK.

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Agriculture  
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### 13. EU and Mercosul to Sponsor R&D in Biotechnology

DEC. 26, 2008 - The European Union and Mercosul announced they will allocate three million Euros for five research and development (R&D) projects on biotechnology. Each project will last 24 months and count on partnerships between public and private institutions from academic and productive sectors in the four member countries of Mercosul (Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay). The main objective is to promote the development of biotechnology in the avian, bovine, and forestry sectors of the region.

Source - SciDev

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Health  
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### 14. Argentina's Deadly Yellow Fever Outbreak Spurs Mass Vaccination

JAN. 06, 2009 - Argentina is vaccinating people against yellow fever amid concern that its first deadly outbreak of the disease in 42 years may spread from jungle areas to the cities. The mosquito-borne virus killed a farm worker in a rural area of Misiones province, which borders Paraguay and Brazil, nine months after a tobacco worker died in the same area, the country's first confirmed yellow fever fatality since 1966. At least 2.5 million Argentinians risk exposure to the virus, said Misiones Governor Maurice Fabian Closs in a statement on the provincial health authority's Web site. Misiones has ordered 1.2 million doses to immunize all residents and those traveling to the province. The Argentine cases add to a wave of infections in humans and monkeys in Brazil, Paraguay and Peru during the past 18 months, most of which were caused by infected mosquitoes circulating in jungle areas.

Source - Bloomberg

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Water Issues  
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### 15. Chile Losing Its Glaciers Fast, Study Reports

DEC. 10, 2008 - Chile's glaciers, frozen reservoirs of fresh water upon which the country heavily depends, are receding at an alarming rate according to a recent report by the National Water Directorate (DGA). The Echaurren glacier, located just 50 kilometers from Santiago, is losing some 12 meters per year, said the November report, which compared data collected between 1986 and 2007. If the melting rate continues, the Echaurren glacier - which supplies 70 percent of Santiago's drinking water - could disappear within the next 50 years. A similar situation is occurring in the south, where Chilean Patagonia's massive ice fields - the largest in the world outside of Greenland and Antarctica - are melting fast. "The results indicate that the Campos de Hielo Sur glaciers generally

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tend to recede, which could be due to climate change in the region," the study reported. "Reduced rainfall and the one degree Celsius rise in the average temperature over the past century have caused the glaciers to melt - in some cases by 580 meters per year." The DGA study highlighted several particularly dramatic cases, including Patagonia's San Rafael and Jorge Montt glaciers, which have receded by 12 and 11 kilometers, respectively, in the past two decades.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

### 16. Landlocked Paraguay Short of Fuel Because of Shallow Rivers

DEC. 27, 2008 - Land locked Paraguay is suffering a shortage of fuel because a serious drought has left the main river, and lifeline, too shallow for vessels with a draught of more than ten feet, according to the Asuncion press. The latest reports indicate that barges carrying 6,000 tons of gasoline and diesel are waiting to tranship to smaller vessels which will then transport the much needed fuel to the capital Asuncion for its distribution. The situation is particularly distressing for the government since fuel demand has increased because of the vacation period and the fact that Pilar, the last available port along the River Paraguay, has no storage facilities. The latest reports indicate that the River Paraguay in Pilar continues to drop at a rate of one to three centimeters per day and on December 26 was 1.89 meters deep.

Source - MercoPress

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Forests  
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### 17. Peru Aims for Zero Deforestation

DEC. 27, 2008 - The Peruvian government says it can reach zero deforestation in just 10 years with the help of funds from Western governments. This ambitious proposal was presented at the latest round of UN talks on climate change, in Poznan. The government claims more than 80% of Peru's primary forests can be saved or protected. Peru has the fourth largest area of tropical forest in the world after Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia. It has around 70 million hectares of tropical forest covering nearly

60% of its territory. Environment Minister Antonio Brack says his ministry has calculated that Peru needs about US\$25m a year for the next 10 years to be able to save or conserve at least 54 million hectares of forest. He says the Peruvian government has already committed \$5m a year, and he is looking for \$20m a year from the international community.

Source - BBC

#### [18. Brazil: Hackers Aid Amazon Logging Scam](#)

DEC. 15, 2008 - Hackers have helped logging firms in Brazil evade limits on tree felling, says a Greenpeace report. The hi-tech criminals penetrated a computer system designed to monitor logging in the Brazilian state of Para. Once inside the system, hackers issued fake permits so loggers could cut down far more timber than environmental officials were prepared to allow. Greenpeace estimates that 1.7m cubic meters of illegal timber may have been removed with the aid of the hackers. Drawing on information released by Brazilian federal prosecutor Daniel Avelino, Greenpeace believes hackers were employed by 107 logging and charcoal companies. Mr

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Avelino is suing the companies behind the mass hack attack for two billion reais (US\$860 million) - the estimated value of the timber illegally sold. The Brazilian investigation of the hackers began in April 2007 and more than 30 ring leaders were arrested during the summer of that year. The ongoing investigation means that now 202 people face charges for their involvement in the subversion of the logging system.

Source - BBC News

#### [19. Paraguay: Land-Clearing in Gran Chaco Halted For Tribe](#)

DEC. 2008 - A nomadic Indian tribe living in isolation in the dense scrub forests of Paraguay's Gran Chaco won a reprieve when Paraguay's Environment Secretariat (Seam) revoked a Brazilian company's permit to clear land in the area. The 300 members of the Totobiegosode tribe have for centuries been working small plots, gathering fruit and honey, hunting and fishing in the northern province of Alto Paraguay with virtually no ties to the outside world. Indian-rights activists say they are the last so-called "uncontacted" people in South America outside the Amazon River basin. But the Totobiegosodes' existence was increasingly threatened by Brazilian and Paraguayan ranchers clearing ever-larger expanses of land. In 2008, the tribe lost nearly 6,000 hectares (15,000 acres) of its traditional land, according to the London-based Survival International, a non-governmental Indian-advocacy group. With deforestation increasing the risks of violent conflict between the Totobiegosode and ranchers, Indian-rights activists and environmentalists applauded the ruling. They say it marks the first major step by the Paraguayan government to protect the tribe and the lands it depends on.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

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Wildlife  
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#### [110. Brazil Moves to Curb Wildlife Trafficking](#)

JAN. 05, 2009 - Brazil has one of the richest varieties of animal species in the world but it is also one of the biggest markets for animal trafficking. Studies produced for the government estimate that as many as 10 million animals are taken from their natural habitats each year; however it is impossible to know the exact number. What is known is that around 50,000 animals are rescued by the authorities each year - representing just a small percentage of those believed to be taken by traffickers. Many animals are said to die en route to market, but again the numbers are subject to conflicting claims. However, no-one disputes that these animals are often transported in horrific conditions. Animal rights groups say the law has been weakened in recent years and that the government needs to do more. An official advertising campaign has now been launched to try to change public attitudes. It shows graphic images of dead animals, with a message to the public: this happens because you buy. Ministers also say legislation will be improved and the number of on-the-ground law enforcers will increase.

Source - BBC News

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Fishing & Marine Conservation

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#### [111. NGO Launches Shark Protection Campaign in Chile](#)

DEC. 11, 2008 - Spurred by studies showing a sharply declining shark population, the Santiago-based NGO Oceana recently launched a shark protection campaign aiming to put an end to "shark finning." Shark finning is the practice of removing a shark's fins once it is caught and then releasing the shark into the water so it can bleed to death. Shark populations in Chilean waters have rapidly declined in recent decades, which is believed to be related to growing Asian consumption of shark fins. Although shark meat is not very appetizing, shark fins are considered a delicacy in expensive Asian restaurants, especially in China and South Korea. Scientists are concerned that declining shark populations destabilize the marine ecosystem by increasing the number of cuttlefish (the primary food source for sharks). The cuttlefish then eat all of the hake and throw the ocean ecosystem out of balance.

Source - Santiago Times

#### ¶12. Chilean Authorities Aid Ailing Salmon Industry

DEC. 2008 - The Chilean government announced that it was making available US\$450 million to help the salmon industry overcome the crippling effects of the Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA) virus. Officials say over half of the money will be used to help industry invest in new methods of production and better control of the virus, which spreads rapidly in packed fish pens and has caused devastating losses to Chilean salmon-farming companies. In particular, the Chilean Economic Development Agency (Corfo) will provide bank loans to finance sanitary improvements on salmon farms, including new water recirculation and waste-treatment facilities. Further, funds will be invested in an ambitious research agenda aimed in part at ways to boost salmon growth and disease resistance. Green groups and associations representing small fishermen are furious at the large size of the governmental aid package for an industry they view as destructive. Moreover, green critics are concerned that the government is on the verge of acceding to a salmon-industry request for immediate, free concessions on some 2,000 undeveloped sites in southern Patagonia.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

#### ¶13. Protected Areas & Conservation Initiatives Venezuela: Treetop Walkway in National Park

DEC. 22, 2008 - The people of Caracas will soon be enjoying El Avila National Park from among its tallest trees, some 30 meters above the ground, standing on a walkway of hanging bridges 120 meters long. In addition to enjoying of the view, the path "is a way to educate those who make the climb to the treetops. The Caracans should be aware of how privileged they are to have this majestic mountain. In order to conserve it, we have to have knowledge," park director Alexis Zambrano told Tierramerica. The sky bridges -- for guided visits in combination with tours on the ground -- were to open to the public on Dec. 12, when the park celebrated its 50th birthday, but heavy rains forced the park to postpone the inauguration until the dry season. The park sits on 85,000 hectares in the mountains that separate the Venezuelan capital from the Caribbean coast.

Source - Tierramerica

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#### ¶14. Guyana: Iwokrama and UNDP Committed To Ensuring Sustainable Ecosystem

DEC. 06, 2008 - A US\$200,000 contract was signed between the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Iwokrama International Center for Rain Forest Conservation and Development to initiate phase two of the Guiana Shield Initiative (GSI). The project entitled 'Ecological and Finance Sustainable Management of the Guiana Shield Eco-Region Project,' is aimed at promoting the sustainable development of the GSI Eco-regional management framework and is funded by several donors. The GSI is designed to enable the six countries within the Guiana Shield (Brazil, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname and Venezuela) and their communities to benefit from their natural resources. One of the major activities of the current GSI project is to set up a pilot program, to develop and test culturally appropriate mechanisms of compensation for ecosystem services. The Iwokrama Center was selected as one of several Guiana shield testing grounds for developing and testing the ecosystem scheme.

Source - Guyana Chronicle

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Pollution  
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#### ¶15. Chile Tightens Anti-Smog Plan for Santiago

DEC. 2008 - Chilean authorities are readying significant revisions to the government plan for cleaning up the severely polluted air in the nation's capital. The new measures include rules aimed at removing cars from the road that don't have catalytic converters; tighter restrictions on car use during smoggy periods; reductions in the sulfur content in fuels; and new standards aimed at boosting the efficiency of wood-fueled stoves. The revisions come as four cities in southern Chile are reporting worrisome smog levels. Mostly due to the wide use of wood stoves for residential heating and cooking, the cities of Valdivia and Temuco experience air pollution rivaling that of Santiago in winter, when smog is at its worst. The cities Talca and Concepcion, meanwhile, also report smog concentrations that sometimes exceed official limits. Public confidence in smog-fighting here has not been high. Over 72% of Santiago residents view government air-quality initiatives as insufficient, according to a Catholic University opinion poll released in July. And critics don't see the air-plan revisions as a breakthrough.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

#### ¶16. Ecuador: Estimated Damages in Chevron Case Jump Up

DEC. 2008 - The court-appointed investigator in the Ecuadorian rainforest-pollution trial of Chevron has revised his estimate of the maximum damages in the case dramatically, boosting it by US\$11 billion. Richard Cabrera reported to the tribunal handling the matter, Nueva Loja Superior Court, that damages stemming from the rainforest drilling in question exceeded US\$27 billion. His initial estimate, made in April, was \$16 billion. The long-running Chevron case focuses on oilfield operations run by a Texaco subsidiary in the Ecuadorian Amazon from 1972 to 1992. Rainforest Indians, who claim that there is ongoing contamination from pits containing toxic drilling waste, are charging Chevron with responsibility by virtue

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of the oil company's 2001 acquisition of Texaco. Chevron is objecting to the new estimate, claiming that Cabrera filed it "[w]ithout a shred of new data or evidence..." As the litigants debated Cabrera's estimate, a panel of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague confirmed its jurisdiction to hear a claim Chevron has filed against Ecuador and the country's state oil company, Petroecuador. Chevron accuses Ecuador of failing to honor oil contracts from 1973 to 1977 and seeks damages of more than US\$1.6 billion and accumulated interest through December 2008.

Source - EcoAmericas

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Extractive Industries  
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¶17. Peru: A Mining Town's Woes

JAN. 07, 2009 - A four-hour drive from the Peruvian capital, the town of Morococha ("colored lake" in the Quechua language) is a living example of what the mining industry has brought to many poor rural villages and towns in this country. The town's high school stadium is located on top of toxic mining debris; most people have no bathrooms in their homes and receive piped water only an hour a day; and the community washing areas use contaminated water. Everything in this town, in the central highlands region of Peru, revolves around the activities of three small mining companies that in a few years will be overshadowed by a larger firm: Chinalco. The Chinese company that plans to extract copper from an open-pit mine that will operate over a three square kilometer area that is now covered by houses. The relocation of Morococha, which was officially incorporated 101 years ago, is inevitable. Chinalco must cover the costs of the resettlement, under an agreement signed with the government in 2007, when it obtained a mining concession that had previously been held by the Canada-based Peru Copper. More than 1,300 families will have to be relocated to allow Chinalco to begin mining for copper and molybdenum on schedule, in 2012.

Source - IPS

¶18. Peru: Open-Pit Mine Continues to Swallow City

JAN. 05, 2008 - An immense open-pit mine located 4380 meters above sea level is swallowing up the centre of the city of Cerro de Pasco in Peru's central highlands, while damage, in the form of toxic waste, spreads to nearby villages. The government just signed a new law to relocate part of the local population, which for decades has suffered from the lead dust, dynamite explosions and toxic gases generated by the mining of zinc, lead and silver. The open-pit mine now operated by Volcan, a Peruvian company, is now 1.8 kilometers long. The Civil Defense Institute concluded in 2006 that 85 percent of the housing around the mine is uninhabitable. To the surprise of many locals, after two years of perseverance by a group of lawmakers, the government of Alan Garcia signed a new law on Dec. 13 that declares the relocation of the town a question of "public need and national interest." The new law gives the government a mid-January deadline to set up an inter-institutional committee that will carry out technical studies for the relocation, finally beginning the resettlement of 11,000 families.

Source - IPS

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Energy  
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¶19. Brazil: An Engine Fuelled by Garbage

DEC. 22, 2008 - An engine that uses garbage, farm and ranch waste and derivatives of oil, coal and ethanol, is the latest invention of Embrapa, the Brazilian agricultural research agency, to bring low-cost energy to poor rural and isolated communities. The engine cannot propel vehicles but it can generate electricity and operate water pumps and ventilation systems. The power depends on the source and the size of the engine, which they hope to have perfected in 2009. The greatest benefit is environmental. "We use the waste that would otherwise pollute to generate energy and work," Wadt told Tierramérica.

Source - Tierramérica

¶20. Chile Looks to Paraguay for Energy Boost

DEC. 19, 2008 - Chile is set to receive a minor reprieve from its current energy crisis in the north following the success of preliminary talks with Paraguay for the purchase of electricity from the Acaray hydroelectric dam. The proposed plan will see an annual 200 MW transmitted through Argentine territory, at an as of yet undetermined toll, to Chile's northern electrical grid (SING) at an annual cost of US\$80 million for the year 2009. The presidents of Chile, Paraguay and Argentina announced the plan on December 17 at the Latin America and Caribbean Leaders Summit held in Brazil. While the current agreement only extends for one year, Chilean Energy Minister Marcelo Tokman says the success of the deal will prove a vital step for future energy integration within the region.

Source - Santiago Times

¶21. Fight in Brazil over Relocation of Amazon Dam

DEC. 2008 - Legal battling broke out over a R\$8.7-billion (US\$3.7 billion) dam project on Brazil's Madeira River after authorities granted a permit for preliminary work to begin at a site for which an environmental-impact assessment has not been prepared. Due to the litigation, site preparation for Jirau, which at 3,300 megawatts would be the second-most-powerful dam in Brazil's Amazon, was halted until Dec. 4, when the government won a ruling allowing the work to



resume. Green advocates are accusing Ibama, the environmental licensing agency that granted the permit, of moving with reckless haste to accommodate government pressure for more hydropower. Says Pedro Bara Neto, Amazon policy director of the U.S. office of World Wildlife Fund (WWF): "This decision shows how Ibama loosened the rigor of its own licensing model because of government pressure to boost energy supply." Controversy over Jirau dates from May, when the Enersus consortium, led by France's Suez group, won the concession to build the dam after offering the lowest selling price for power. That month, Enersus announced it would move the project 12.5 kilometers (7.8 miles) downstream from the site specified in the government-authored bidding documents. It did so on the grounds that the new site would require less excavation, which would allow the dam to be completed by 2012—a year ahead of the original schedule—and would save money.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

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#### 122. Mega Coal Burning Plant Slated For Chile

DEC. 12, 2008 - MPX Energia, a Brazilian energy group, filed an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for a 2.4 GW coal-fired energy plant to be located 80 km south of Copiapo (Region III) - near the heart of Chile's first-of-the-season table grape deal. The plant will cost US\$4.4 billion and includes two 127 MW diesel-fired turbines and six 350 MW pulverized coal-fired units. Pending approval, the facility would be constructed in an area called Punta Cachos and be connected to the country's SIC energy grid. Company officials said the two diesel units are expected to come on line in the first half of 2011, while the first coal unit will be on line in the second half of 2012. The final coal-fired unit is expected to begin operations in 2016, at which time the diesel units will be used for backup. The EIS statement reports that the coal-burning plant will use seawater to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions, while solid remains will be buried 15 km from the plant in a 125 hectare depository. A desalinization plant with the capacity to produce 71,700 m3/d of fresh water will link up to the generator complex and will provide water for nearby industry and agriculture. Nearly 154,000 m3/d of seawater will be used.

Source - Santiago Times

#### 123. Chile Weighs of Tidal Energy Option

DEC. 10, 2008 - The Chilean Navy's Hydrographic and Oceanographic Service (SHOA) has begun studies to locate the best spots for tidal power plants along the country's immense coastline. According to studies by the consultant company Baird & Associates, Chile has a huge potential for wave-powered energy production. "It is possible to produce 240,000 MW along Chile's coast, twice the capacity of hydro and thermoelectric stations," said Baird project engineer Patricio Monardez. Monardez believes many investors are interested in exploring Chile's waves and expects Chile to have its first tidal power plant installed within three to five years. According to Monardez, wave power competes with wind power, which costs between US\$2.5 and 3.5 million per MW. Wave power costs between US\$3 and 7 million per MW. Still, tidal energy production requires tremendous investment and very advanced technology. In addition to the cost and technology issues, Chile will have to consider environmental impact issues and how to transfer power from the sea to the continent.

Source - Santiago Times

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Climate Change  
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#### 124. Brazil Finally Quantifies Amazon Preservation Goals

DEC. 2008 - After a year of discussions involving thirteen federal ministries and consultations with a wide range of businesses, public agencies and civil society, the Brazilian government on Dec. 1 finally published its long-awaited National Climate Change Plan. For a country in which 75% of carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions are estimated to arise from deforestation—mainly in the Amazon—it is no surprise that reaction to the 120-page document has focused on the plan's unprecedented targets for reducing the rate at which the world's largest tropical forest is being flattened, principally to make way for cattle pasture and cropland. That reaction has been strikingly mixed. There is delight in some quarters that after years

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of resisting them, the Brazilian government has committed itself to quantified targets against which the effectiveness of policies to protect the rainforest can now be measured. But the plan also has drawn criticism on grounds that these targets, in effect, accept further Amazon deforestation over the next decade of some 70,000 square kilometers (27,000 sq miles)—an area the size of the Republic of Ireland. The climate plan's headline-grabber is a commitment to reduce deforestation by 70% from 2006 to 2017, avoiding CO2 emissions on the order of 4.8 billion tons. To put this into context, the annual greenhouse gas emissions of the entire European Union are currently the equivalent of a little over 5 billion tons of CO2.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

#### 125. Chile Launches Climate Change Plan

DEC. 12, 2008 - Strategies to evaluate and mitigate the impacts of climate change on energy resources, biodiversity, and health, are some of the measures established by Chile's National Action Plan against Climate Change 2008–2012, launched by president Michelle

Bachelet on December 4. The plan establishes US\$10.6 million for research on second generation biofuels and a State Fund of US\$400 million to invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency. The Plan also contemplates the implementation of a Biofuels Policy, incentives for the use of forest and agriculture residues to generate bioenergy, and the use of solar panels in the construction of new houses. With respect to water availability, the Plan focuses on a strategy to manage glaciers and the building of desalinators in cities of Chile's arid north. With respect to sanitary aspects, the plan aims to "strengthen and create new capacities to face yellow fever, dengue fever, and malaria".

Source - SciDev

#### 126. World Bank Study: Chile Must Change To Face Climate Change

DEC. 15, 2008 - Climate change will drastically affect Chile's traditional production sectors and tourism in the coming years, reported a World Bank study on the rise of greenhouse gas emissions in Latin America. The report, released on Dec. 10, analyzes repercussions that global warming will have in the region and discusses possible solutions, such as cutting back on coal-burning energy plants. In its analysis of Chile, the WB report considers studies performed by the country's former Public Works Minister Eduardo Bitran, who now heads the Chilean government's Innovation Council. According to Bitran, Chile is not well prepared to confront drastic climate changes in the next few decades. One of the key problems highlighted in Bitran's study is water, a resource that largely influences the country's agriculture, mining, and energy sectors. Bitran predicts that an overabundance of water in northern Chile - brought on primarily by increasing temperatures that will melt large glaciers within the next 20 years - will be positive for production in the zone but that there needs to be a stronger initiative to take advantage of this resource before it disappears. Bitran suggests building many run-of-the-river dams and reservoirs to capitalize on water reserves. He also wants to open up debate on water rights, which are currently highly disputed between the mining and agricultural sectors.

Source - Santiago Times

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General  
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#### 127. Top Environmental Official in Argentina Loses Her Job

DEC. 2008 - Argentine Environment Secretary Romina Picolotti was ousted from office after becoming the subject of a corruption investigation and drawing criticism from green groups for failing to challenge government pro-mining policies and ensure cleanup of a notoriously polluted river. Picolotti, an environmental attorney, was appointed in 2006. At the time, she was representing environmental groups in the Argentine city of Gualaquaychu that were opposed to the construction across the Uruguay River of a vast Uruguayan pulp mill. Critics of Picolotti have filed legal complaints accusing her of excessive spending in office for such purposes as private plane flights within the country, and of hiring family members to work in her secretariat. A judge investigating the complaints has not issued a decision on whether formal charges will be filed. From a job-performance standpoint, one of Picolotti's greatest difficulties was a lack of progress in the plan to clean up the Matanza-Riachuelo river basin, which borders Buenos Aires and for decades has been seen as a symbol of industrial pollution in Argentina. After ordering the firing on Dec. 2, President Kirchner named Homero Bibiloni as the new environment secretary. Bibiloni, an environmental attorney, served for the first three years of Nstor Kirchner's administration as undersecretary of natural resources.

Source - EcoAmericas

#### 128. Western Hemisphere Nations OK Labor, Environmental review

DEC. 10, 2008 - Western Hemisphere nations agreed to review labor and environmental practices in an effort to make sure that trade helps rather than hurts their countries. The pledge came from a meeting of more than a dozen U.S. trading partners that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attended in Panama. The ministers released a statement after the session that pledged to look for the best ways to avoid environmental degradation and labor abuses - two problems critics say have been aggravated by the pursuit of increased international trade. Rice urged Latin American nations to continue fighting poverty and avoid the temptation close off trade as they are buffeted by the world financial crisis. The meeting included officials from Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Uruguay and Peru.

Source - Miami Herald

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Upcoming Events  
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#### 129. International Technical Mission on Climate Change, Sustainable Development and Urban Planning Lima and Callao, Peru Feb. 25-27, 2009

#### 130. 1st National Congress on Protected Areas Bogota, Colombia March 9-12

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Renewable Energy World Conference & Expo North America  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
March 10-12, 2009

131. 2nd Latinamerican Congress on Biorefineries  
May 4-6, 2009  
Termas de Chillan, Chile

132. 3rd Interamerican Congress on Solid Waste  
May 6-8, 2009  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

133. 2nd International Workshop on Advances in Cleaner Production  
Sao Paulo, Brazil  
May 20-22, 2009

134. 4th International Bioenergy Conference  
Curitiba, Brazil  
June 16-19, 2009

135. First International Seminar on Environmental Issues in the  
Mining Industry  
Santiago, Chile  
Sept. 30 - Oct. 02, 2009

136. XIII World Forestry Congress  
Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Oct. 18-25, 2009

137. VI World Park Rangers Congress  
Santa Cruz, Bolivia  
Nov. 2009

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